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Powell, Alexander E.
The Beckoning Lane

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THE BECKONING LAND



Five
Edward L. ~~Thorne~~
No. 7. 20

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“ His loving faith in Mother-land
Knew never shade of turning ;
By Britain’s lakes, by Neva’s wave,
Whatever sky was o’er him,
He heard her rivers’ rushing sound,
Her blue peaks rose before him.”

-Whittier's "*Randolph of Roanoke*."



Sunrise Photograph from the top of Mill Mountain
BY WILL HENRITZ

THE DAWN OF A NEW DAY

THE BECKONING LAND

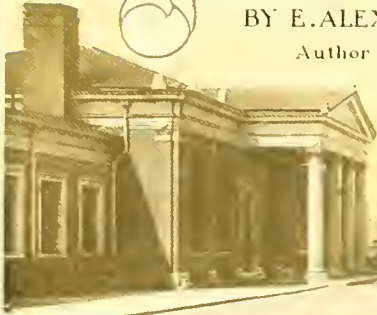
BY E. ALEXANDER POWELL, F. R. G. S.

Author of "The Third Empire"

"Masters of Europe"

"All Aboard for Bombay"

"The Last Frontier," Etc.



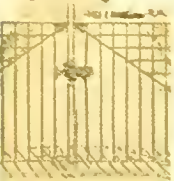
I FIRST heard about the Beckoning Land from an African prince—at least he said that he was a prince—in a Paris music-hall. The Balkan War was virtually over, Adrianople had fallen, and I, having scraped the mud of Bulgaria from my boots, was loafing in the Gay City until the next New York-bound steamer sailed. One evening I accompanied a friend to the Folies Bergere, which, as every one knows, is the most vivid of Paris' countless palaces of pleasure. Strolling out to the buffet during the entr'acte, we found a chocolate-colored individual, whose checkered suit and white-topped shoes fairly radiated prosperity, sprawling over the bar.

"Well, George," I remarked, "you're a long ways from home. When did you leave the Pullman service?"

He drew himself up with a great assumption of dignity.

"Ah'd have youh understan', sah," he said pompously, "dat Ah's not a common, low-down American niggah. Ah's a African prince."

"Come, come," said I sharply. "Perhaps you can make these French people believe that, but you needn't try to give me any such song-and-dance. I'm an American."



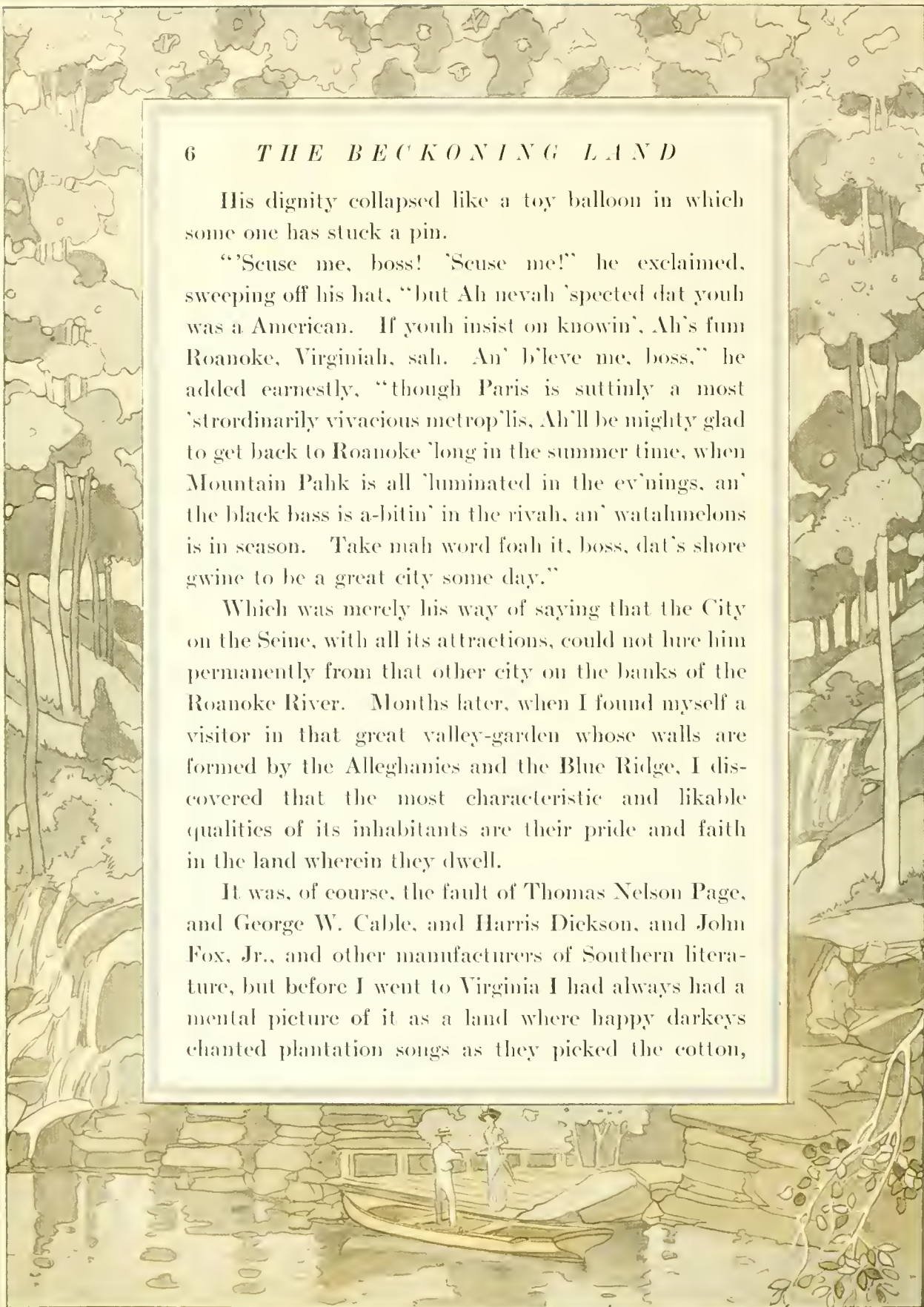
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His dignity collapsed like a toy balloon in which some one has stuck a pin.

"'Seuse me, boss! 'Seuse me!" he exclaimed, sweeping off his hat, "but Ah nevah 'spected dat youh was a American. If youh insist on knowin', Ah's fum Roanoke, Virginiah, sah. An' b'leve me, boss," he added earnestly, "though Paris is suttinly a most 'strordinarily vivacious metrop'lis, Ah'll be mighty glad to get back to Roanoke 'long in the summer time, when Mountain Pahk is all 'luminated in the ev'nings, an' the black bass is a-bitin' in the rivah, an' watahmelons is in season. Take mah word foah it, boss, dat's shore gwine to be a great city some day."

Which was merely his way of saying that the City on the Seine, with all its attractions, could not lure him permanently from that other city on the banks of the Roanoke River. Months later, when I found myself a visitor in that great valley-garden whose walls are formed by the Alleghanies and the Blue Ridge, I discovered that the most characteristic and likable qualities of its inhabitants are their pride and faith in the land wherein they dwell.

It was, of course, the fault of Thomas Nelson Page, and George W. Cable, and Harris Dickson, and John Fox, Jr., and other manufacturers of Southern literature, but before I went to Virginia I had always had a mental picture of it as a land where happy darkeys chanted plantation songs as they picked the cotton,



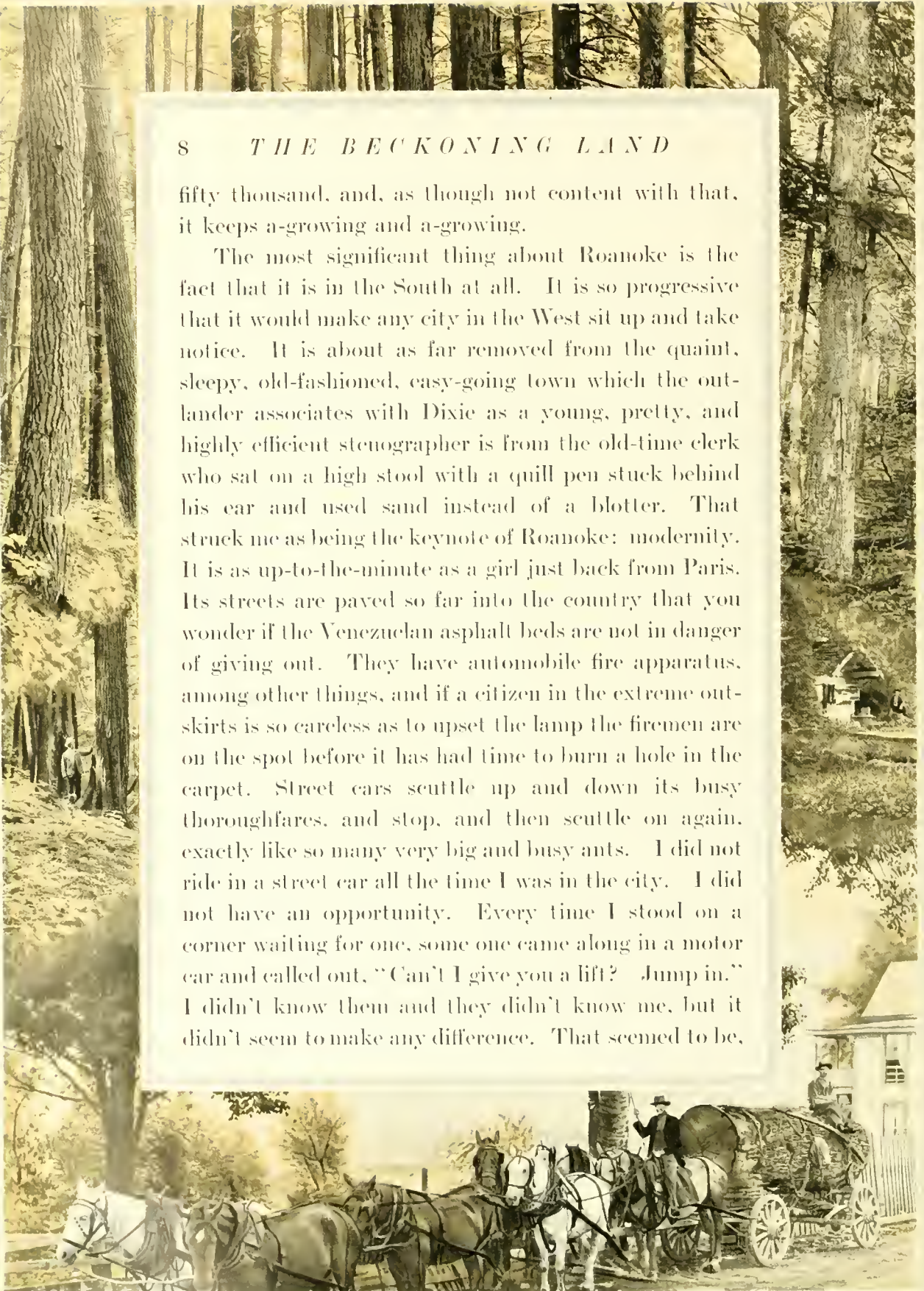
and where white-moustached Southern colonels in frock coats and Panama hats spent their days riding furiously after foxes and their evenings sitting on the piazzas of colonial mansions sipping mint juleps. Roanoke I had imagined to be a sleepy, lazy town, still wrapped in memories of "Before the War," with ramshackle street cars drawn by decrepit mules, and rows of saddle horses tied to hitching rails along the main street, and grass growing between the cracks in the sidewalk. I was—I admit it with shame—as ignorant as all that and this article is my medium of apology.

In the first place, it was nearly two decades after the surrender at Appomattox before there was such a town as Roanoke on the map, so it is obvious that its municipal development is not likely to be retarded by any very antiquated ideas. Prior to that time it was merely an eating station on the stage route to the Cumberland Gap, being known by the not particularly euphonic name of Old Lick, which indicated, I suppose, that salt was to be found in the vicinity. When the population reached the one hundred mark the name was altered to Big Lick, as befitted a town with metropolitan pretensions, but it was not until 1882, when the census taker had five hundred names upon his list, that the name was changed to Roanoke, which means appropriately enough, "money." In a space of barely thirty years the insignificant hamlet of half a thousand souls had sprung into a bustling city of approximately



fifty thousand, and, as though not content with that, it keeps a-growing and a-growing.

The most significant thing about Roanoke is the fact that it is in the South at all. It is so progressive that it would make any city in the West sit up and take notice. It is about as far removed from the quaint, sleepy, old-fashioned, easy-going town which the outlander associates with Dixie as a young, pretty, and highly efficient stenographer is from the old-time clerk who sat on a high stool with a quill pen stuck behind his ear and used sand instead of a blotter. That struck me as being the keynote of Roanoke: modernity. It is as up-to-the-minute as a girl just back from Paris. Its streets are paved so far into the country that you wonder if the Venezuelan asphalt beds are not in danger of giving out. They have automobile fire apparatus, among other things, and if a citizen in the extreme outskirts is so careless as to upset the lamp the firemen are on the spot before it has had time to burn a hole in the carpet. Street cars scuttle up and down its busy thoroughfares, and stop, and then scuttle on again, exactly like so many very big and busy ants. I did not ride in a street car all the time I was in the city. I did not have an opportunity. Every time I stood on a corner waiting for one, some one came along in a motor car and called out, "Can't I give you a lift? Jump in." I didn't know them and they didn't know me, but it didn't seem to make any difference. That seemed to be,





Mountain Lake—four thousand feet above tide, a large and lovely lake; it is of surpassing grace, and is, beyond all question, one of the finest stretches of mountain-gift water to be seen in this country. Its setting in the mountain frame is perfect. Its shores are a dream of rhododendron, laurel, and azalea, which bloom in June and July, and this is enhanced by a dark background of hemlock and other varieties of primitive forest trees. One of the greatest charms of Mountain Lake is the transparency and absolute purity of its waters. When the day is clear and calm, one can gaze far down into its glorious depths and see the trout darting about, or discern a perfect labyrinth of logs and trees which, becoming water-logged, have sunk in an interlocking embrace.”

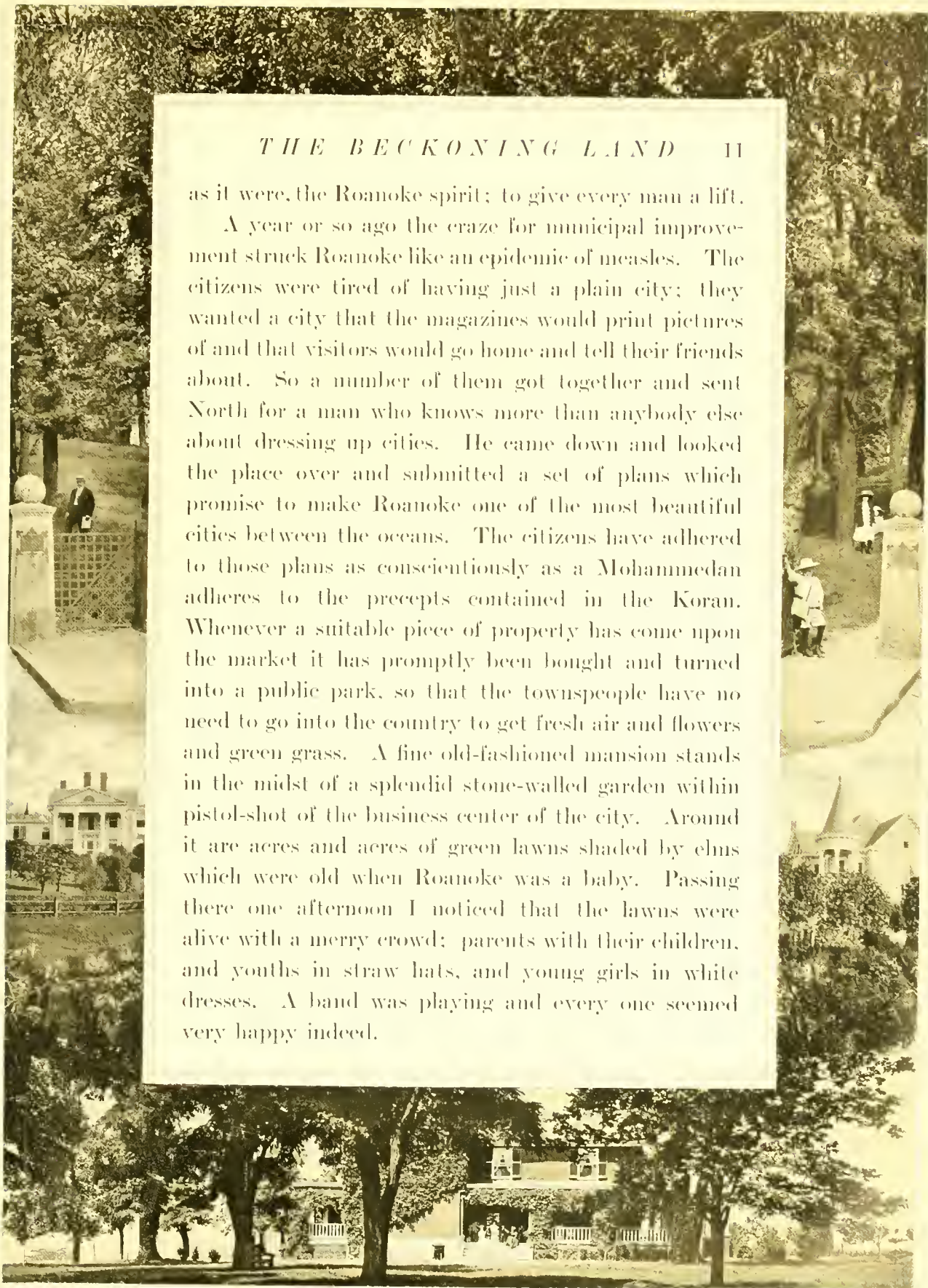


"Do you mind the cabin of logs, Ben Bolt, at the edge of the pathless wood,
And the button-ball tree with its motley limbs which nigh by the doorstep stood?"

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as it were, the Roanoke spirit; to give every man a lift.

A year or so ago the craze for municipal improvement struck Roanoke like an epidemic of measles. The citizens were tired of having just a plain city; they wanted a city that the magazines would print pictures of and that visitors would go home and tell their friends about. So a number of them got together and sent North for a man who knows more than anybody else about dressing up cities. He came down and looked the place over and submitted a set of plans which promise to make Roanoke one of the most beautiful cities between the oceans. The citizens have adhered to those plans as conscientiously as a Mohammedan adheres to the precepts contained in the Koran. Whenever a suitable piece of property has come upon the market it has promptly been bought and turned into a public park, so that the townspeople have no need to go into the country to get fresh air and flowers and green grass. A fine old-fashioned mansion stands in the midst of a splendid stone-walled garden within pistol-shot of the business center of the city. Around it are acres and acres of green lawns shaded by elms which were old when Roanoke was a baby. Passing there one afternoon I noticed that the lawns were alive with a merry crowd; parents with their children, and youths in straw hats, and young girls in white dresses. A band was playing and every one seemed very happy indeed.



"A garden party, I suppose," said I.

"Not at all," answered my companion, "just people out for an airing. That's one of our public parks. The place came into the market not long ago and we bought it."

"But it's almost in the heart of the city," I remarked. "It must have cost some money."

"It did," said he, "but what's the use of a park if it's so far away that it is an effort to reach it?"

Banks are always accurate barometers of a city's prosperity. In Roanoke there is a barometer of this kind on nearly every down-town corner. One of them in particular is as beautiful an example of architecture, inside and out, as you will find anywhere. It would not look out of place on Wall Street. They have a surprising number of very beautiful homes in Roanoke—English Tudor, and French Chateau, and Italian Renaissance, and Spanish Mission, and plain white frame with green blinds—but the pure Colonial, with its stately white columns and its splendid, dignified lines, they seem to have completely overlooked, although it is the one style which is peculiarly and characteristically Virginian. Indeed, you will find more examples of colonial architecture in Seattle than you will in Roanoke. But that is the way of the world. I once went to Persia to get some Persian lambskins, only to be told that the best ones had all been shipped to New York. After all, the question of what style of



houses the people of Roanoke choose to build is essentially their own business. Still, it seems a pity. . . . The stranger who strolls along the down-town streets of Roanoke and looks in the shop windows (and if there is a more fascinating way of passing a spare hour than looking in shop windows, I do not know it) does not have to say, "I guess I'll wait until I get to Richmond or Washington before I buy that hat," or dress, or suit, or necktie, as the case may be, for the Roanoke merchants tread hard on the heels of fashion.

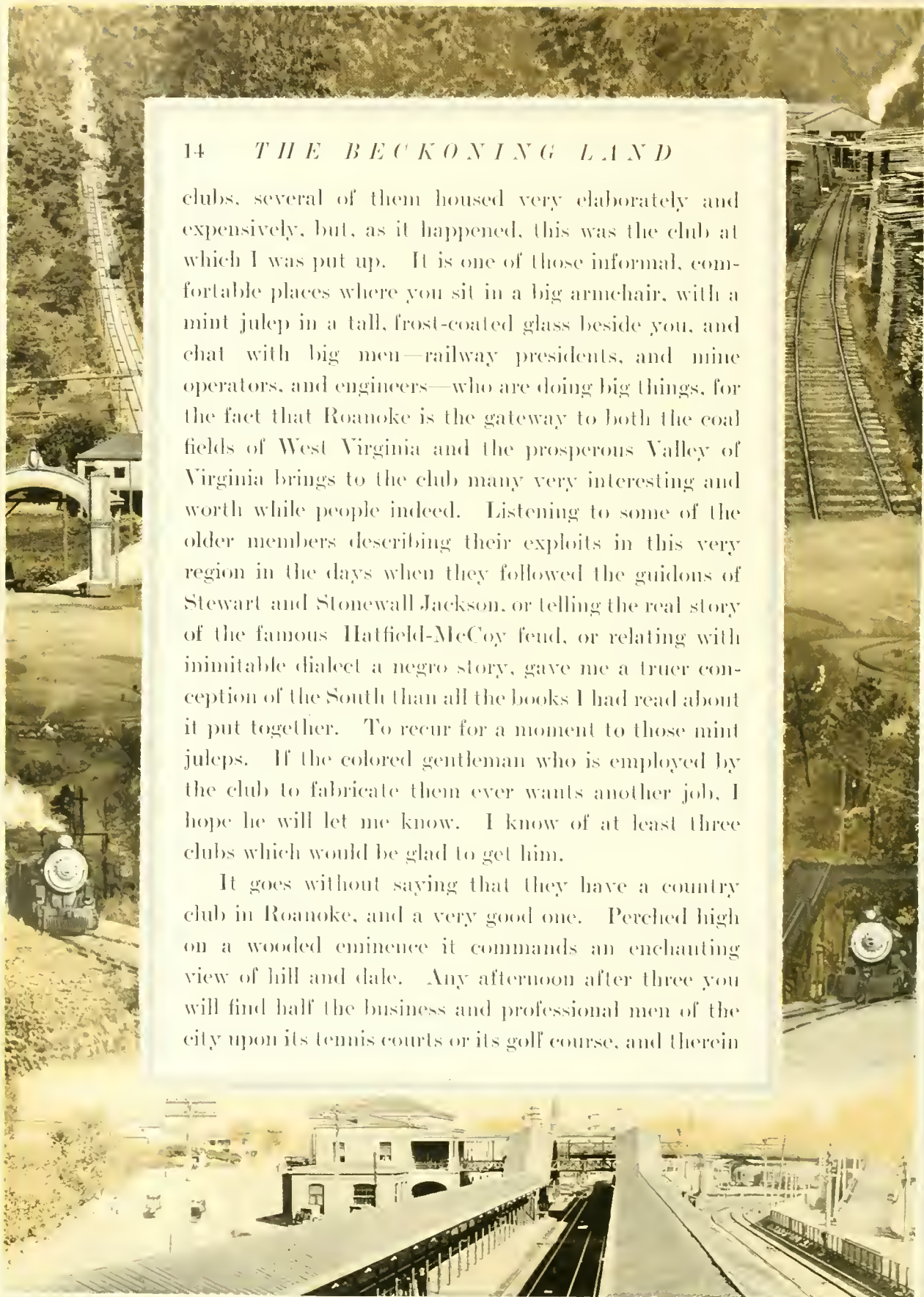
The first thing to catch your eye as the train pulls into Roanoke is *the* hotel. It is long, and low, and shingled, with broad, cool, comfortable verandas with vines clambering over them, and it has innumerable balconies and gables and quaint dormer windows. It stands on a knoll in the middle of a park, with trees and flower beds and sweeping lawns of emerald velvet bordered by a privet hedge. It is so big and spacious and unlike the orthodox city hotel in its appearance that every one mistakes it for a club house and is correspondingly gratified when they find that it is open to the public, for, after a hot and dusty railway journey, green lawns and cool verandas are far more alluring than peacock alleys of imitation onyx and elaborately stuccoed, porte-cochères façades. I might add that the hotel in question is liberally bathtubized.

They have a club in Roanoke called the Shenandoah. As a matter of fact, they have a number of



clubs, several of them housed very elaborately and expensively, but, as it happened, this was the club at which I was put up. It is one of those informal, comfortable places where you sit in a big armchair, with a mint julep in a tall, frost-coated glass beside you, and chat with big men—railway presidents, and mine operators, and engineers—who are doing big things, for the fact that Roanoke is the gateway to both the coal fields of West Virginia and the prosperous Valley of Virginia brings to the club many very interesting and worth while people indeed. Listening to some of the older members describing their exploits in this very region in the days when they followed the guidons of Stewart and Stonewall Jackson, or telling the real story of the famous Hatfield-McCoy feud, or relating with inimitable dialect a negro story, gave me a truer conception of the South than all the books I had read about it put together. To recur for a moment to those mint juleps. If the colored gentleman who is employed by the club to fabricate them ever wants another job, I hope he will let me know. I know of at least three clubs which would be glad to get him.

It goes without saying that they have a country club in Roanoke, and a very good one. Perched high on a wooded eminence it commands an enchanting view of hill and dale. Any afternoon after three you will find half the business and professional men of the city upon its tennis courts or its golf course, and therein





"For sixty years he has had nothing to do but sit in his rocking chair upon this piazza and watch the grass grow, and the stock fatten, and the money come rolling in."

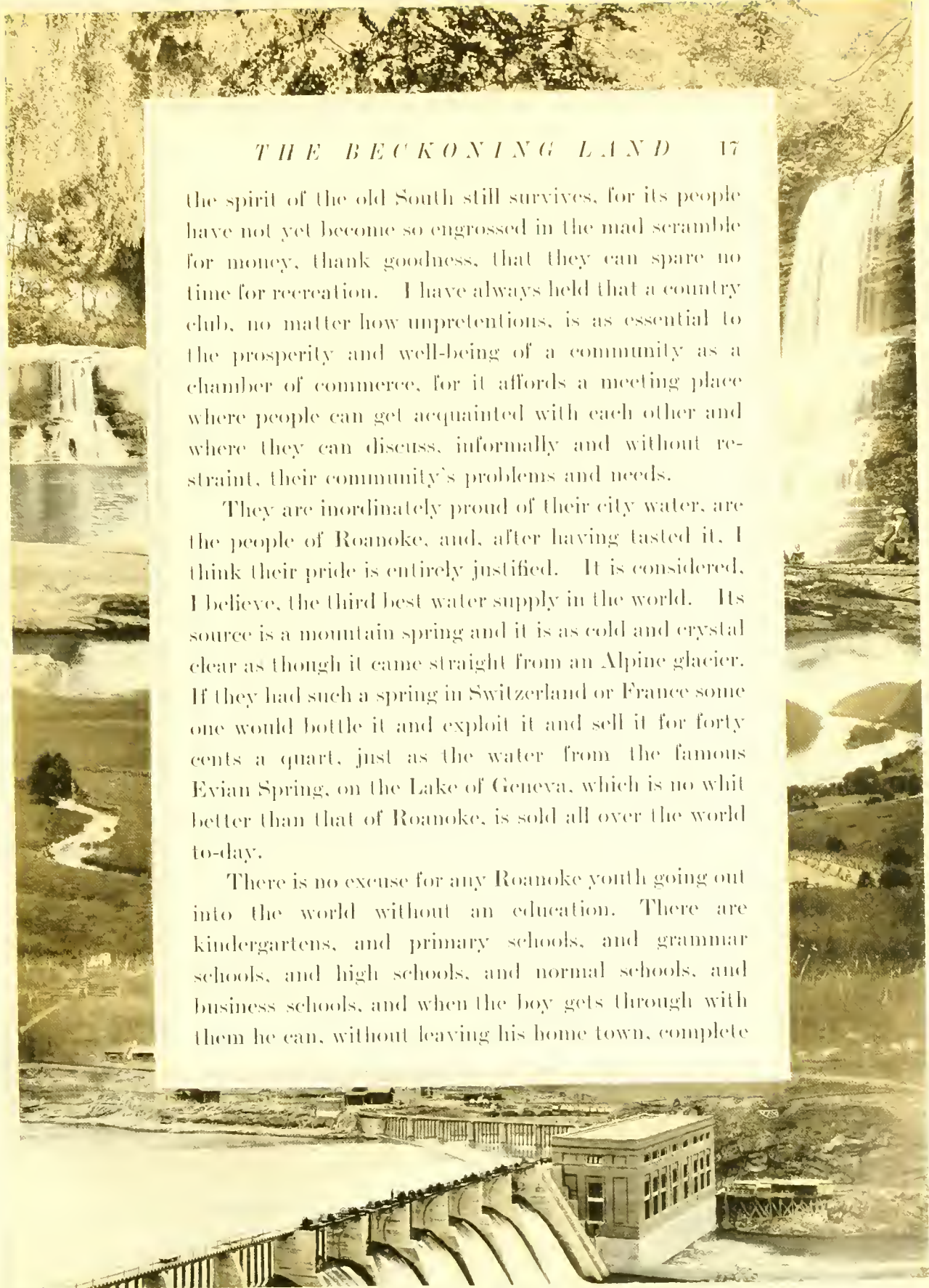
“Can you hear the murmur of its rivers and the rustle of its forests and the whisper of the wind amid its grain? They beckon and call to you, my friend, to *you*.”



the spirit of the old South still survives, for its people have not yet become so engrossed in the mad scramble for money, thank goodness, that they can spare no time for recreation. I have always held that a country club, no matter how unpretentious, is as essential to the prosperity and well-being of a community as a chamber of commerce, for it affords a meeting place where people can get acquainted with each other and where they can discuss, informally and without restraint, their community's problems and needs.

They are inordinately proud of their city water, are the people of Roanoke, and, after having tasted it, I think their pride is entirely justified. It is considered, I believe, the third best water supply in the world. Its source is a mountain spring and it is as cold and crystal clear as though it came straight from an Alpine glacier. If they had such a spring in Switzerland or France some one would bottle it and exploit it and sell it for forty cents a quart, just as the water from the famous Evian Spring, on the Lake of Geneva, which is no whit better than that of Roanoke, is sold all over the world to-day.

There is no excuse for any Roanoke youth going out into the world without an education. There are kindergartens, and primary schools, and grammar schools, and high schools, and normal schools, and business schools, and when the boy gets through with them he can, without leaving his home town, complete

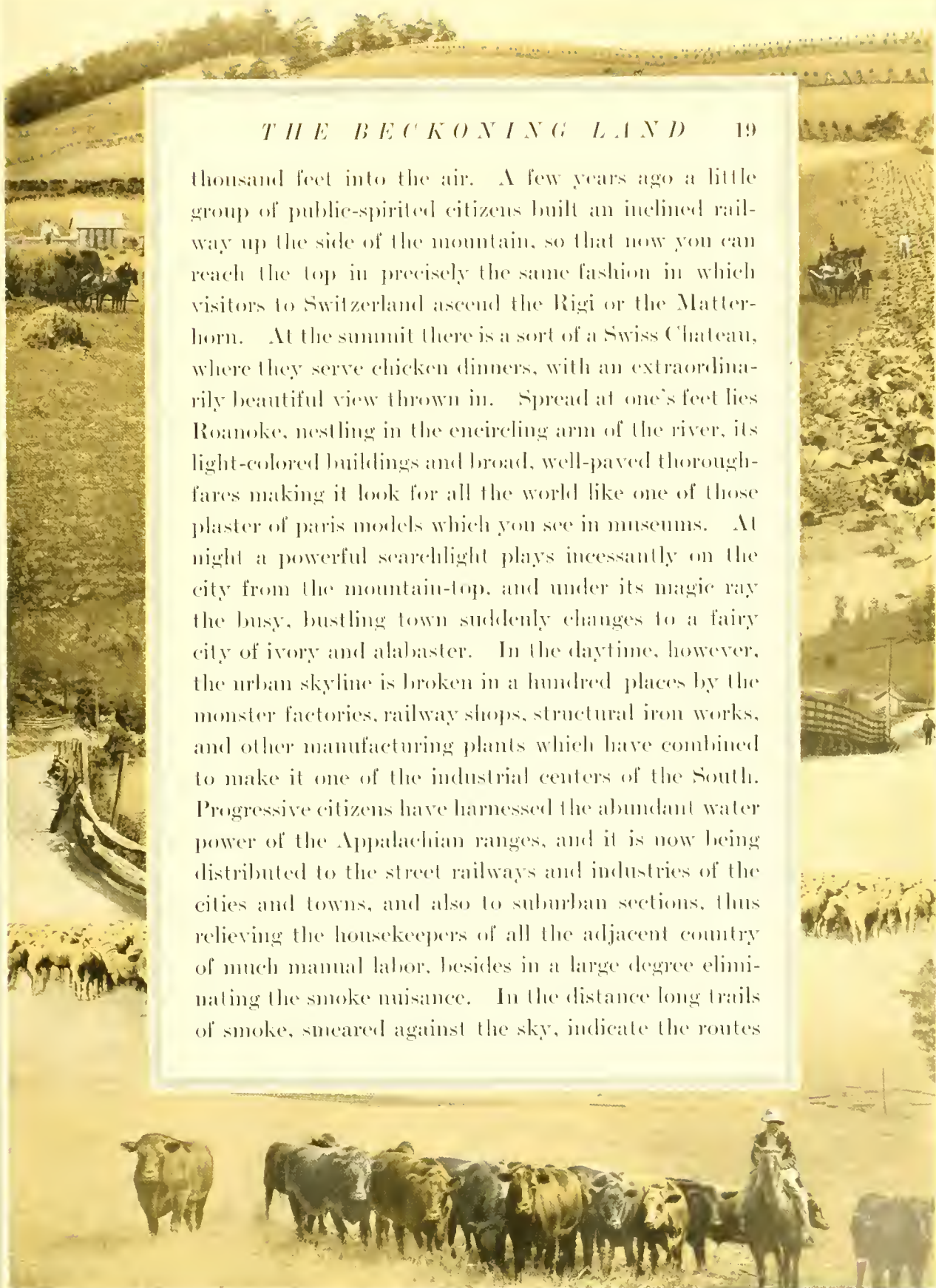


his education at Roanoke College, or breaking home ties, he can go over to Lexington (where Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson lie sleeping), forty-odd miles away, and attend either the famous Virginia Military Institute or the University of Washington and Lee, of which, at the close of the war, the famous Confederate leader became president. Venturing still farther afield, the Roanoke lad will find at Charlottesville, some ninety miles distant, the admirably equipped and beautifully situated University of Virginia, founded by Thomas Jefferson. The education of the other sex is equally well provided for, for on a wooded mountain-side in the suburbs of Roanoke stands the Virginia College for Young Ladies, and at Botetourt Springs, half a dozen miles away, is the Hollins College for Girls, one of the best known and most fashionable finishing schools in the South. From the day when the Roanoke youngster first scrawls on his slate the straggling letters of the alphabet until, in cap and gown, he receives his beribboned diploma and his university degree at a famous institution of learning, he need never go beyond the limits of the region of which Roanoke is the center. I doubt, indeed, if there is any place in the United States where a boy or girl can obtain so thorough an education at such small cost and amid such inspiring traditions as in Southwestern Virginia.

From the southern confines of the city the densely forested slopes of Mill Mountain rise abruptly a

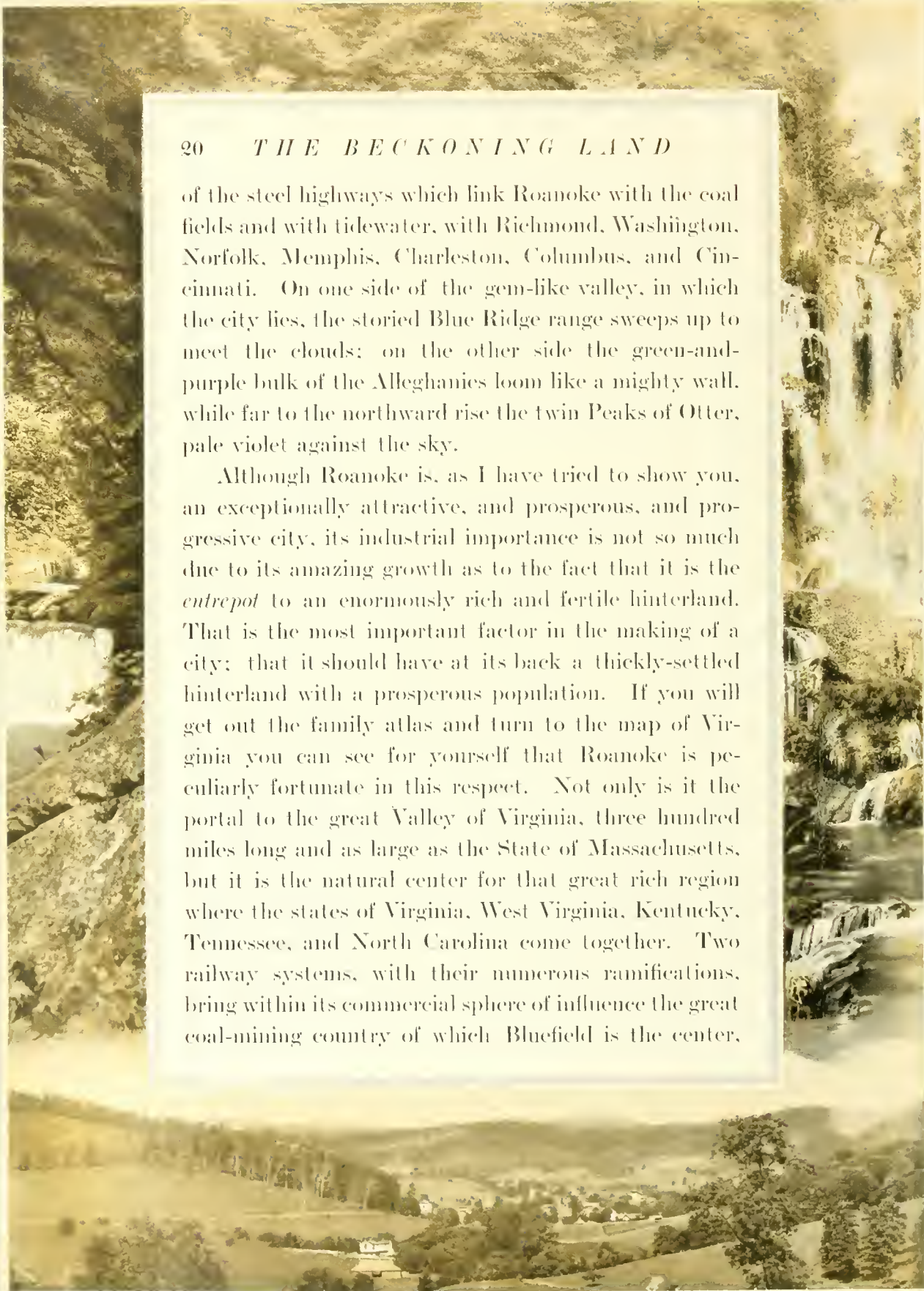


thousand feet into the air. A few years ago a little group of public-spirited citizens built an inclined railway up the side of the mountain, so that now you can reach the top in precisely the same fashion in which visitors to Switzerland ascend the Rigi or the Matterhorn. At the summit there is a sort of a Swiss Chateau, where they serve chicken dinners, with an extraordinarily beautiful view thrown in. Spread at one's feet lies Roanoke, nestling in the encircling arm of the river, its light-colored buildings and broad, well-paved thoroughfares making it look for all the world like one of those plaster of paris models which you see in museums. At night a powerful searchlight plays incessantly on the city from the mountain-top, and under its magic ray the busy, bustling town suddenly changes to a fairy city of ivory and alabaster. In the daytime, however, the urban skyline is broken in a hundred places by the monster factories, railway shops, structural iron works, and other manufacturing plants which have combined to make it one of the industrial centers of the South. Progressive citizens have harnessed the abundant water power of the Appalachian ranges, and it is now being distributed to the street railways and industries of the cities and towns, and also to suburban sections, thus relieving the housekeepers of all the adjacent country of much manual labor, besides in a large degree eliminating the smoke nuisance. In the distance long trails of smoke, smeared against the sky, indicate the routes



of the steel highways which link Roanoke with the coal fields and with tidewater, with Richmond, Washington, Norfolk, Memphis, Charleston, Columbus, and Cincinnati. On one side of the gem-like valley, in which the city lies, the storied Blue Ridge range sweeps up to meet the clouds; on the other side the green-and-purple bulk of the Alleghanics loom like a mighty wall, while far to the northward rise the twin Peaks of Otter, pale violet against the sky.

Although Roanoke is, as I have tried to show you, an exceptionally attractive, and prosperous, and progressive city, its industrial importance is not so much due to its amazing growth as to the fact that it is the *entrepot* to an enormously rich and fertile hinterland. That is the most important factor in the making of a city; that it should have at its back a thickly-settled hinterland with a prosperous population. If you will get out the family atlas and turn to the map of Virginia you can see for yourself that Roanoke is peculiarly fortunate in this respect. Not only is it the portal to the great Valley of Virginia, three hundred miles long and as large as the State of Massachusetts, but it is the natural center for that great rich region where the states of Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and North Carolina come together. Two railway systems, with their numerous ramifications, bring within its commercial sphere of influence the great coal-mining country of which Bluefield is the center,





"Have you ever, by any chance, visited this blue grass region? No? It is, I give you my word, the most wonderful grazing land in this or any other country. . . . Think of having a farm which requires neither harrowing, nor plowing, nor seeding, nor fertilizing, and to which neither frost nor rain can do serious harm."



"Until I visited the Roanoke country I had never thought of Virginia as an apple-producing state. As a matter of fact, however, it has more apple trees in bearing than Oregon, Washington, and California combined. The famous apple growing belt of Southwestern Virginia, with its ten thousand square miles of orchards, and the celebrated 'blue grass' belt, is a continuation of those rich grazing lands which have made the horsedflesh of Kentucky famous."

the famous apple-growing belt of Southwestern Virginia, with its ten thousand square miles of orchards, and the celebrated "blue grass" belt, which is a continuation of those rich grazing lands which have made the horseflesh of Kentucky famous.

Have you ever, by any chance, visited this blue grass region? No? It is, I give you my word, the most wonderful grazing land in this or any other country. The grass, which, by the way, is not blue at all, but a peculiarly vivid green (the man who named it must have been color blind, poor fellow), attains its best development upon clay soils overlying limestone, growing to perfection in that zone which extends from Western Virginia into Kentucky and Tennessee. Blue grass, though furnishing hay of excellent quality, does not yield a large quantity and on this account its chief value is for pasturage. For this purpose it is unsurpassed. It spreads with amazing rapidity, forming a firm, dense sod which is not appreciably injured by the trampling of stock. Three years are required, so I was told, to make a good, firm sod, after which it requires practically no attention. In Wythe, Pulaski, and Tazewell counties I was shown pasture after pasture more than half a century old and in as good condition as ever. I met one aged gentleman-farmer who told me that his four thousand acres of blue grass pasture had not known a plowshare in sixty years. He lived in a big, old-fashioned homestead on a hill overlooking



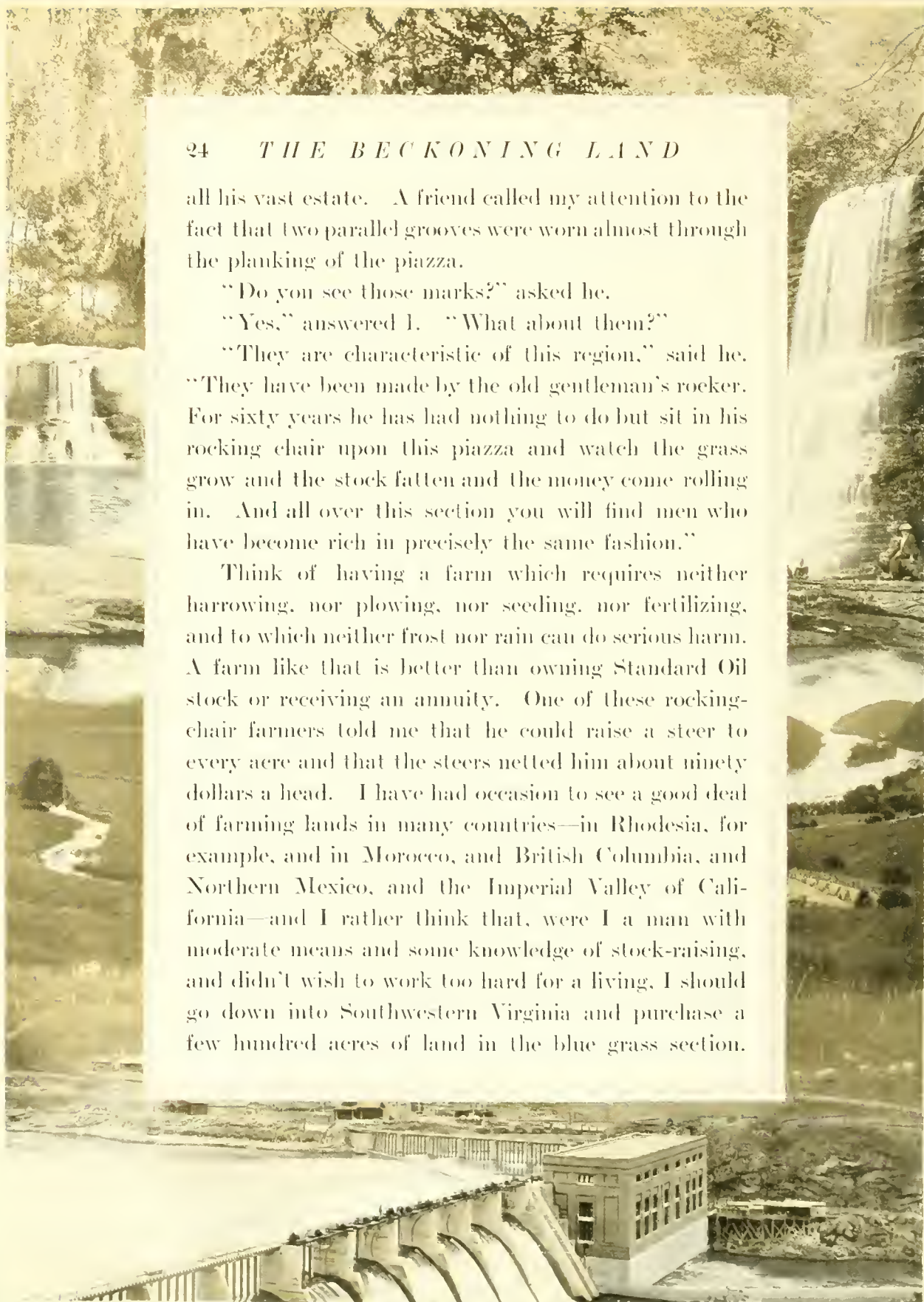
all his vast estate. A friend called my attention to the fact that two parallel grooves were worn almost through the planking of the piazza.

"Do you see those marks?" asked he.

"Yes," answered I. "What about them?"

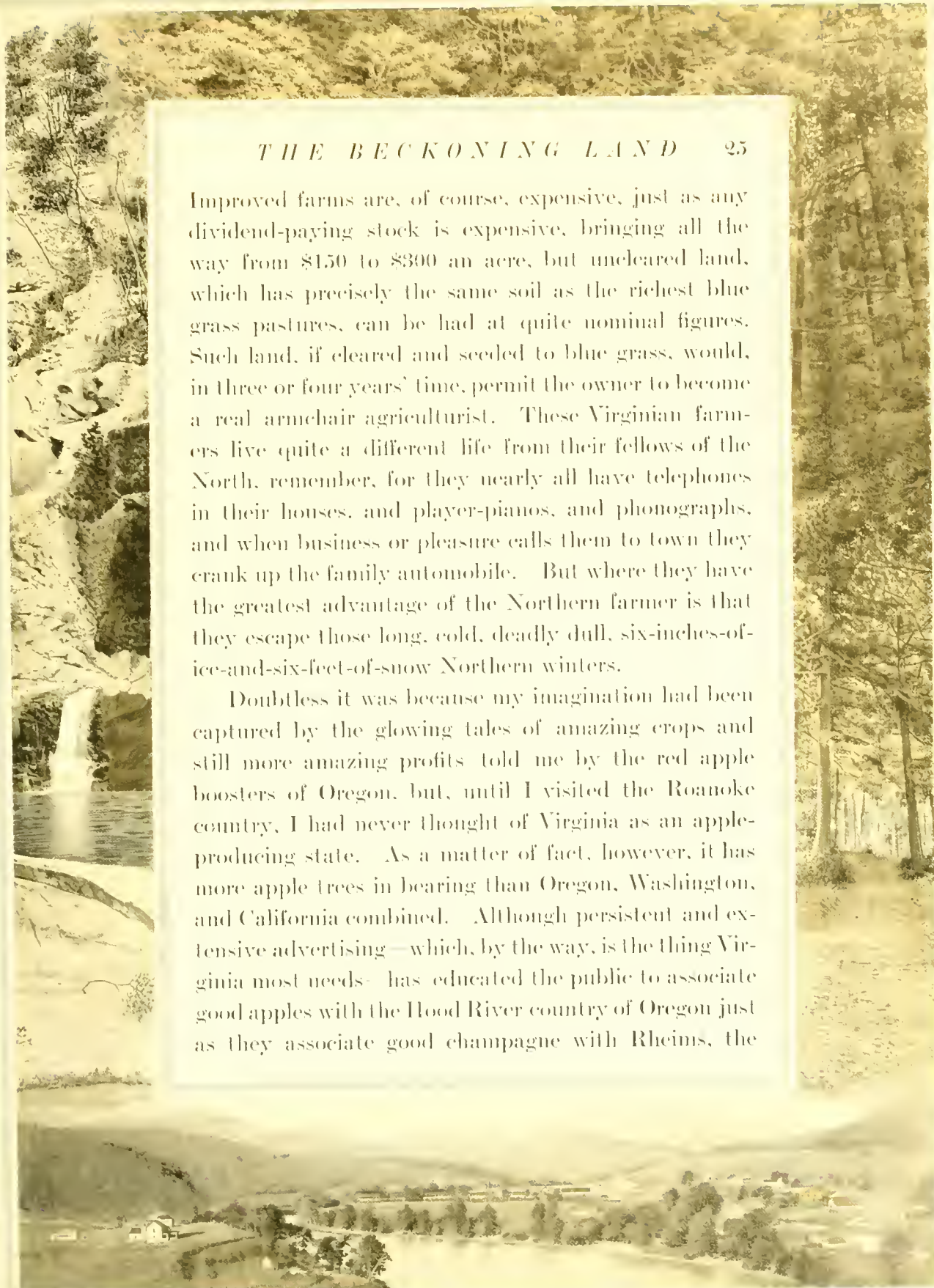
"They are characteristic of this region," said he. "They have been made by the old gentleman's rocker. For sixty years he has had nothing to do but sit in his rocking chair upon this piazza and watch the grass grow and the stock fatten and the money come rolling in. And all over this section you will find men who have become rich in precisely the same fashion."

Think of having a farm which requires neither harrowing, nor plowing, nor seeding, nor fertilizing, and to which neither frost nor rain can do serious harm. A farm like that is better than owning Standard Oil stock or receiving an annuity. One of these rocking-chair farmers told me that he could raise a steer to every acre and that the steers netted him about ninety dollars a head. I have had occasion to see a good deal of farming lands in many countries—in Rhodesia, for example, and in Morocco, and British Columbia, and Northern Mexico, and the Imperial Valley of California—and I rather think that, were I a man with moderate means and some knowledge of stock-raising, and didn't wish to work too hard for a living, I should go down into Southwestern Virginia and purchase a few hundred acres of land in the blue grass section.



Improved farms are, of course, expensive, just as any dividend-paying stock is expensive, bringing all the way from \$150 to \$300 an acre, but uncleared land, which has precisely the same soil as the richest blue grass pastures, can be had at quite nominal figures. Such land, if cleared and seeded to blue grass, would, in three or four years' time, permit the owner to become a real armchair agriculturist. These Virginian farmers live quite a different life from their fellows of the North, remember, for they nearly all have telephones in their houses, and player-pianos, and phonographs, and when business or pleasure calls them to town they crank up the family automobile. But where they have the greatest advantage of the Northern farmer is that they escape those long, cold, deadly dull, six-inches-of-ice-and-six-feet-of-snow Northern winters.

Doubtless it was because my imagination had been captured by the glowing tales of amazing crops and still more amazing profits told me by the red apple boosters of Oregon, but, until I visited the Roanoke country, I had never thought of Virginia as an apple-producing state. As a matter of fact, however, it has more apple trees in bearing than Oregon, Washington, and California combined. Although persistent and extensive advertising—which, by the way, is the thing Virginia most needs—has educated the public to associate good apples with the Hood River country of Oregon just as they associate good champagne with Rheims, the



Hood River Valley has attained a fame wholly disproportionate to its size, for it is not much of a valley, as valleys go in Virginia, being but twenty-five miles long and three wide. The Shenandoah Valley, which is the apple-producing section of Virginia, is, on the contrary, twenty-five miles wide and three hundred miles long, with a soil almost identical with that of Oregon but having a somewhat milder climate. Statistics don't mean very much to me, and I don't believe they do to the average reader either, but a business man living in the fruit section assured me that a quarter of a million barrels of apples had been shipped out of that district last year, and, as he seemed to lay such particular emphasis on the fact, I am repeating the information for what it is worth.

Throughout my visit in Southwestern Virginia I was struck by the extraordinary number of farmers who were racing about the country in big, expensive-looking automobiles, but it was not until I went into the apple-growing section that I discovered how they were able to afford them. For example, I was shown one orchard, in the Back Creek country near Roanoke, consisting of eight hundred trees, the owner of which had sold his crop for \$15,000 cash, the purchaser to do the work of picking. Another man, who had only four acres of trees high on a mountainside, sold his last season's crop for \$2,500 and he didn't have to do the picking either. Still another orchard was pointed out





"The Natural Bridge is, as its name implies, a titanic limestone arch, 215 feet high, 100 feet wide, and 90 feet in span, thus providing a natural passageway over the tumultuous waters of Cedar Creek. Perhaps it will give a more graphic conception of its immensity if I add that were the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor to be placed under it, pedestal and all, there would still be threescore feet to spare."

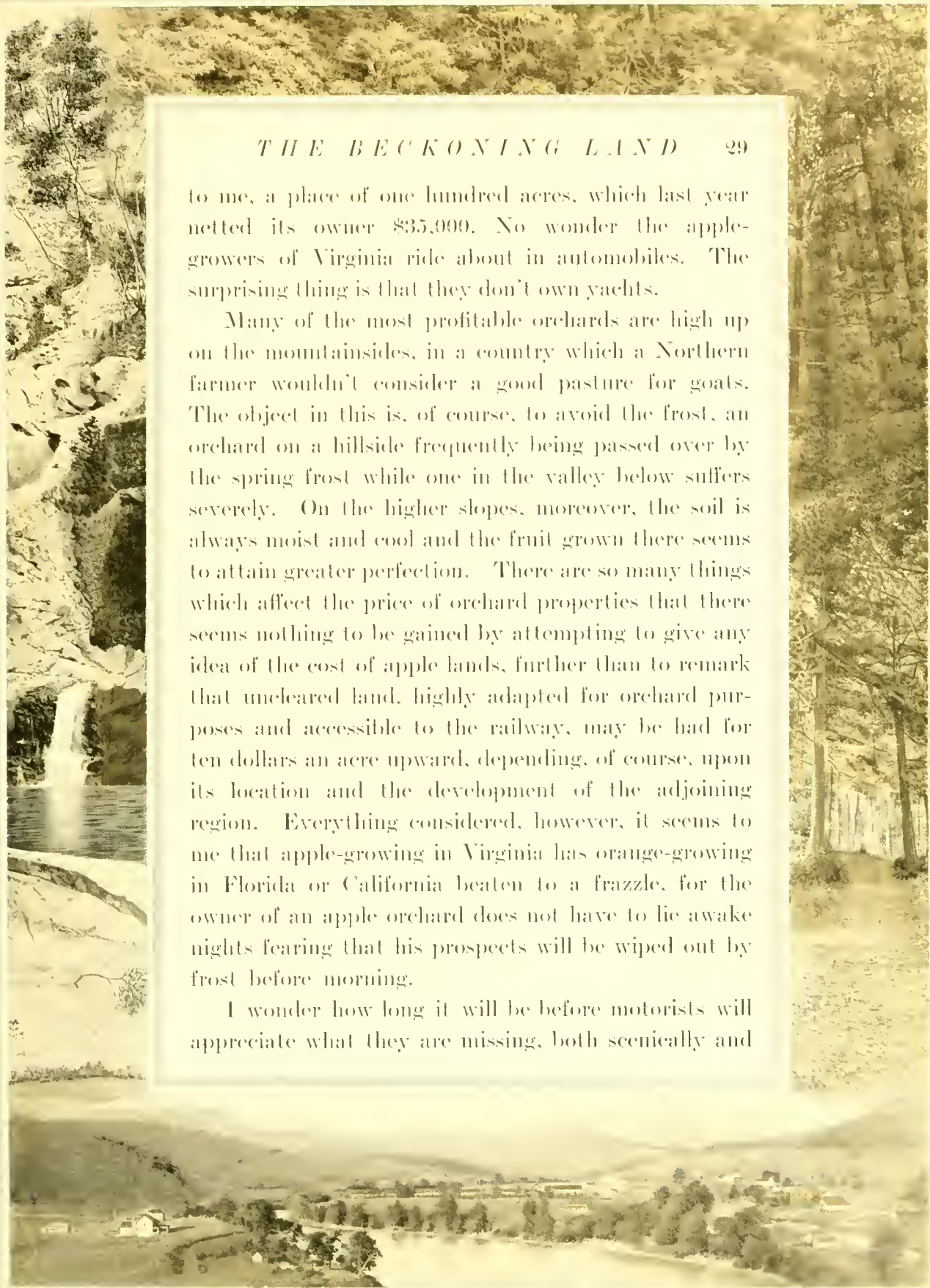


"To reach the house you cross the brook by a little bridge, and swing back a creaking gate in an old-fashioned picket fence and pass up a rambling, grass-grown pathway to the hospitable piazza, with honeysuckle clambering over its white columns. . . . Beside the piazza stands a venerable giant of an elm with a seat of boards built round its base. It was on that seat that Thomas Dunn English composed what is said to be the most popular song ever written."

to me, a place of one hundred acres, which last year netted its owner \$35,000. No wonder the apple-growers of Virginia ride about in automobiles. The surprising thing is that they don't own yachts.

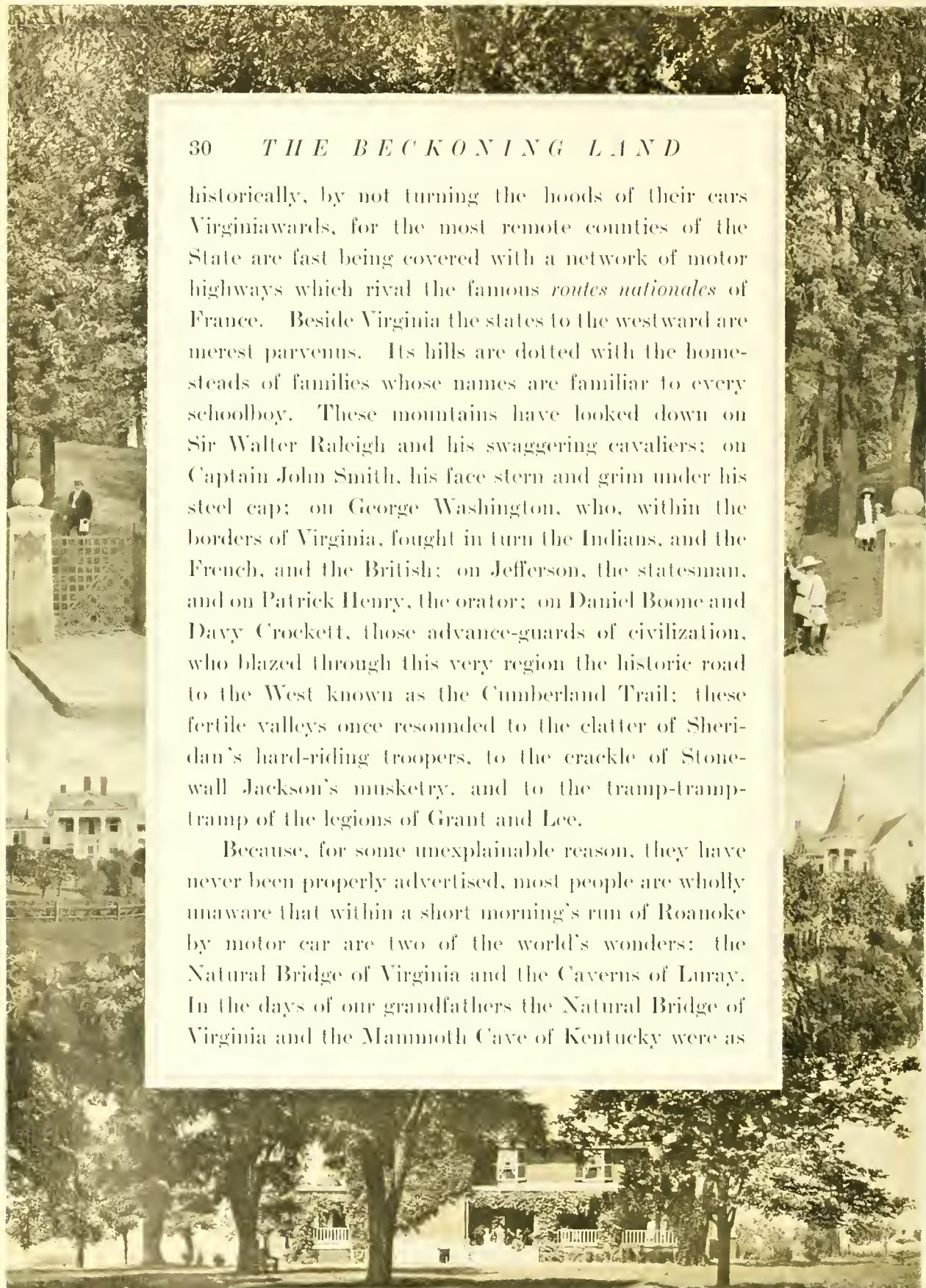
Many of the most profitable orchards are high up on the mountainsides, in a country which a Northern farmer wouldn't consider a good pasture for goats. The object in this is, of course, to avoid the frost, an orchard on a hillside frequently being passed over by the spring frost while one in the valley below suffers severely. On the higher slopes, moreover, the soil is always moist and cool and the fruit grown there seems to attain greater perfection. There are so many things which affect the price of orchard properties that there seems nothing to be gained by attempting to give any idea of the cost of apple lands, further than to remark that uncleared land, highly adapted for orchard purposes and accessible to the railway, may be had for ten dollars an acre upward, depending, of course, upon its location and the development of the adjoining region. Everything considered, however, it seems to me that apple-growing in Virginia has orange-growing in Florida or California beaten to a frazzle, for the owner of an apple orchard does not have to lie awake nights fearing that his prospects will be wiped out by frost before morning.

I wonder how long it will be before motorists will appreciate what they are missing, both scenically and



historically, by not turning the hoods of their cars Virginia-wards, for the most remote counties of the State are fast being covered with a network of motor highways which rival the famous *routes nationales* of France. Beside Virginia the states to the westward are merest parvenus. Its hills are dotted with the homesteads of families whose names are familiar to every schoolboy. These mountains have looked down on Sir Walter Raleigh and his swaggering cavaliers; on Captain John Smith, his face stern and grim under his steel cap; on George Washington, who, within the borders of Virginia, fought in turn the Indians, and the French, and the British; on Jefferson, the statesman, and on Patrick Henry, the orator; on Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett, those advance-guards of civilization, who blazed through this very region the historic road to the West known as the Cumberland Trail; these fertile valleys once resounded to the clatter of Sheridan's hard-riding troopers, to the crackle of Stonewall Jackson's musketry, and to the tramp-tramp-tramp of the legions of Grant and Lee.

Because, for some unexplainable reason, they have never been properly advertised, most people are wholly unaware that within a short morning's run of Roanoke by motor car are two of the world's wonders: the Natural Bridge of Virginia and the Caverns of Luray. In the days of our grandfathers the Natural Bridge of Virginia and the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky were as



much a part of the itinerary of every traveled American as the Grand Cañon and the Yosemite are to-day, but "*autres jours, autres mœurs*" as the French say. The Natural Bridge is, as its name implies a titanic limestone arch, 215 feet high, 100 feet wide, and 90 feet in span, thus providing a natural passageway over the tumultuous waters of Cedar Creek. Perhaps it will give a more graphic conception of its immensity if I add that were the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor to be placed under it, pedestal and all, there would still be threescore feet to spare.

Some years ago, when I was living in Brussels, I made an excursion into the Belgian Ardennes for the purpose of visiting the celebrated Grottoes of Haan. They are marvelously beautiful, are these stalactite caves of Southern Belgium, and when I had completed the four-hours' tour of them I was very enthusiastic.

"Yes, they are very interesting," observed a German scientist who was in the party, "but I cannot understand you, an American, being so loud in your praise of them when you have in your own country a cave which is far more wonderful and beautiful."

"You mean the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky, I suppose?" asked I.

"Not at all," answered he. "That is very large and very wonderful, of course, but in the beauty and color of its formations it should not be spoken of in



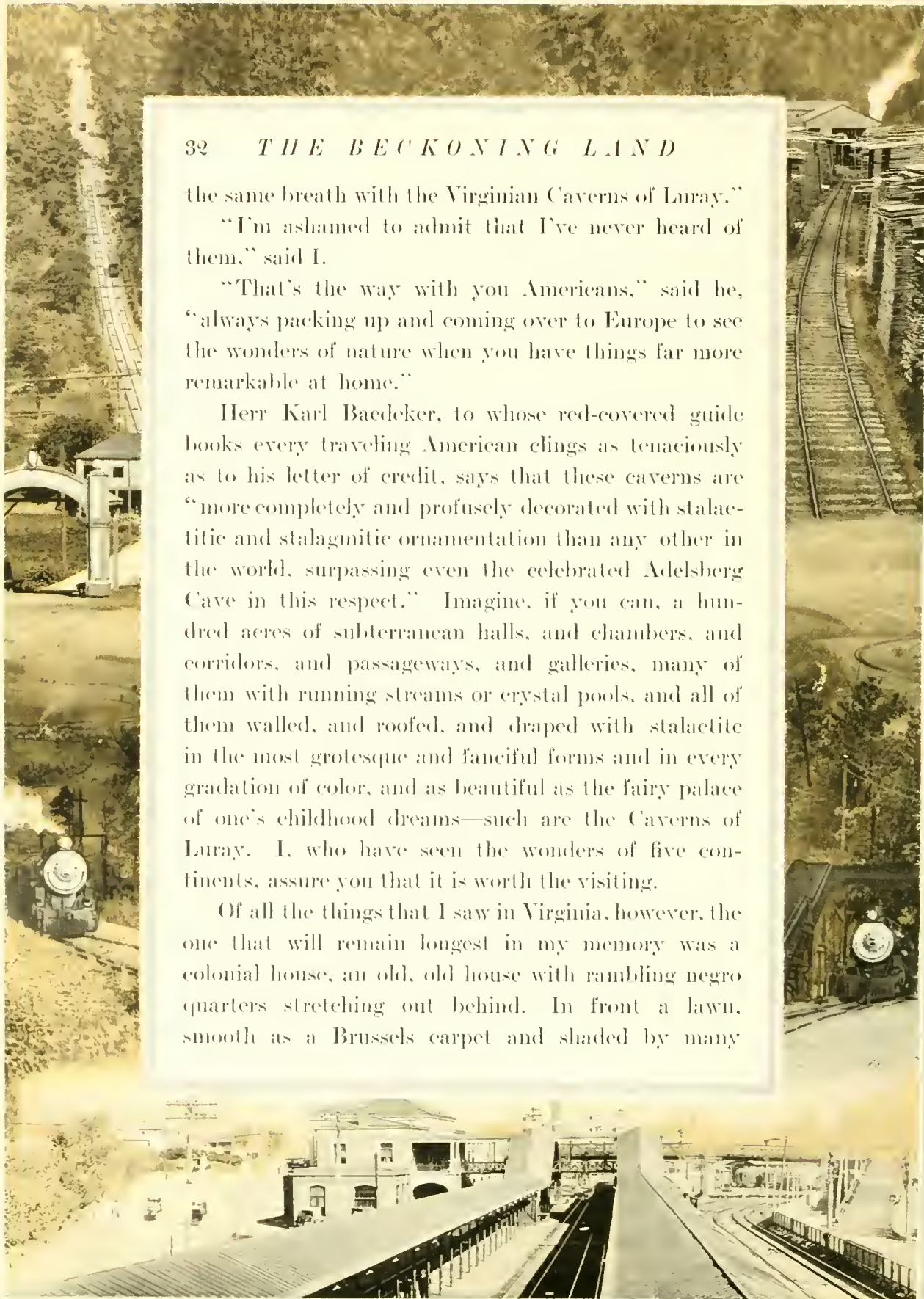
the same breath with the Virginian Caverns of Luray."

"I'm ashamed to admit that I've never heard of them," said I.

"That's the way with you Americans," said he, "always packing up and coming over to Europe to see the wonders of nature when you have things far more remarkable at home."

Herr Karl Baedeker, to whose red-covered guide books every traveling American clings as tenaciously as to his letter of credit, says that these caverns are "more completely and profusely decorated with stalactitic and stalagmitic ornamentation than any other in the world, surpassing even the celebrated Adelsberg Cave in this respect." Imagine, if you can, a hundred acres of subterranean halls, and chambers, and corridors, and passageways, and galleries, many of them with running streams or crystal pools, and all of them walled, and roofed, and draped with stalactite in the most grotesque and fanciful forms and in every gradation of color, and as beautiful as the fairy palace of one's childhood dreams—such are the Caverns of Luray. I, who have seen the wonders of five continents, assure you that it is worth the visiting.

Of all the things that I saw in Virginia, however, the one that will remain longest in my memory was a colonial house, an old, old house with rambling negro quarters stretching out behind. In front a lawn, smooth as a Brussels carpet and shaded by many



ancient oaks and elms, sweeps down to a singing brook. To reach the house you cross the brook by a little bridge, and swing back a creaking gate in an old-fashioned picket fence, and pass up a rambling, grass-grown pathway to the hospitable piazza, with honeysuckle clambering over its white columns. It is the sort of place which you read about in novels but which you never expect to find. Beside the piazza stands a venerable giant of an elm with a seat of boards built round its base. It was on that seat that Thomas Dunn English composed what is said to be the most popular song ever written. You may have heard it. It runs something like this:

"Oh, don't you remember sweet Alice, Ben Bolt,
Sweet Alice with hair so brown?
She wept with delight when you gave her a smile
And trembled with fear at your frown."

and the concluding verses:

"Do you mind the cabin of logs, Ben Bolt,
At the edge of the pathless wood,
And the button-ball tree with its motley limbs
Which nigh by the doorstep stood?"

"The cabin has gone to ruin, Ben Bolt,
The tree you would seek in vain,
And where once the lords of the forest waved
Grows grass and golden grain."

Though those lines were written nearly three-quarters of a century ago their author was more pro-



phetic than he knew. Not alone the countryside of the song, but all this portion of Virginia has changed from the old to the new. Even one who sees it only from a car-window can hardly fail to be impressed by its air of prosperity and progress. Substantial farm houses look down upon well-kept farms with neat stables and whitewashed fences; sleek cattle stand knee-deep in grassy meadows; trim schoolhouses peep out from amid the trees at almost every turning; in the spring the mountain slopes are white with blossoming orchards; the station platforms are piled high with the products of farm and factory; the whole land seems a-hum with energy and industry. The old, indolent, conservative, unprogressive spirit of which the novelists have written so much is as dead as the spirit of secession, and in its place has come the spirit of progress, of up-and-doing. Roanoke, remember, is newer than most western cities and hence is unhampered by custom or tradition. As a result, the region of which it is the center is, to all intents and purposes, a bit of the hustling, bustling West set down in a greener, fairer land. And it is calling to those who would make their homes and their fortunes under sunny skies. Can't you hear the murmur of its rivers, and the rustle of its forests, and the whisper of the wind amid its grain? They beckon and call to you, my friend, to *you*. That is why I call it "The Beckoning Land."





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